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ABSTRACT

This paper lists and tentatively assesses three experiments in preschool education in rural areas in France, and outlines the Massif Central development program which draws extensively on these experiments. In Experiment I, a peripatetic teacher worked with young children, concentrating on speech activities in four different single-class schools. In Experiment II, part-time schooling was conducted in response to the desire of the local authorities to keep preschool education in their own geographic areas, and the parents' wish to spare their children the inconvenience of travelling to school. The teacher divides her work between two communes so that she travels instead of the children. The third experiment, the intermunicipal scheme at Margerides, is discussed in detail as it was central to the development of the Massif Central program. Origins of the experiment, its innovational aspects, reasons for choice of geographical location, and the educational, human, and material difficulties are discussed in detail. Solutions to these difficulties include providing beginning teachers with training appropriate to the task of teaching in a rural environment, using psychological persuasion and information to win over parents, teachers, and the local community, converting the physical environment to suit the purposes of the experiment, providing female attendants and transportation, and initiating parent involvement. Finally, theoretical proposals and reports focusing on the development of the Massif Central program are briefly discussed. Experimental schemes and projects currently underway are also listed. (CM)

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PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE MASSIF CENTRAL (FRANCE)

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COMMITTEE FOR GENERAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

"Pre-school education in the Massif Central"
(France)

by

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Inspecteur d'Academie
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On 29 September 1975, Mr Valéry GISCARD D'ESTAING, President of the French Republic, addressing members of the Regional Council of Auvergne at Le Puy-en-Velay, presented a long-term development plan for the Massif Central.

This programme - which had been in preparation for several months under the Prime Minister, Mr Jacques CHIRAC (1) - included, among 40 measures decided upon "to combat the human and economic devitalisation of the region" (2), a major drive in the field of pre-school education.

> "In the course of 1976, an overall plan for pre-school education in the Massif Central will be drawn up in consultation with local councils. This plan will fully reflect the diversity of situations - particularly demographic - and will therefore have to adopt new methods. It will not confine itself rigidly to children's education but will endeavour to make the nursery school a centre of interest for mothers, particularly in the least-populated areas, where it will thus help to combat isolation" (3).

The programme provided for the introduction of a number of experiments as from 1975.

However, when the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior, through the Commission for Town and Country Planning and Regional Action (Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale), first approached the Minister of Education in May 1975 in order to instigate experiments, their request had already been anticipated by the work done in this field by two Ministers of Education, Mr FONTANET and Mr HABY, and their Secretaries of State with special responsibility for problems of pre-school education, Mrs PLOUX and Mrs LESUR. Some experiments in establishing nursery classes or schools had been conducted in certain départements with common characteristics, namely:

1. A completely rural area with no other resources than agriculture and with economic difficulties aggravated by special geographical or climatic conditions.

2. An area in economic decline where the existence of a nursery school could provide an element of support for families and an argument for young farming couples to stay on the land.

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(1) At the request of the President of the Republic by letter of 12 May 1976.

(2) Speech by Mr Valéry GISCARD D'ESTAING on 29 September 1976.

(3) "Le Programme de Développement du Massif Central" - V: "L'amélioration des conditions de vie - 7: Services publics en milieu rural - paragraph 2: Préscolarisation.

3. An area where the population of each commune was so low, dwellings were so scattered and the local topography was so difficult that co-operation between communes and aid for local authorities were absolutely essential.

It should be noted that these characteristics constitute some of the criteria adopted by the Rural Renewal Office (Commissariat à la Rénovation Rurale) for classifying regions as "mountain areas" and are common to the 17 départements covered by the Massif Central development programme (4), or at least to a very large part of their areas, since as at 15 September 1975, 2,039 communes out of a total of 3,528 were classified as being in mountain areas and formed the "depths of the Massif Central" as referred to by the Minister of the Interior, Mr Michel PONIATOWSKI, in his letter of introduction to the Massif Central Programme (5).

PART I

EXPERIMENTS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

As far back as the spring of 1973, at a meeting chaired by Mrs PLOUX, the Secretary of State, a number of ideas were put forward and while some led only to theoretical studies (eg buses fitted up as nursery classrooms touring the area) others were tried out. Here it would seem of interest, indeed essential, to list these experiments and make a tentative assessment of them, for in their pre-school education plan the Inspecteurs d'Academie (Regional Inspectors of Education) in the Massif Central drew extensively on this initial work and came to propose schemes of the same type.

1st experiment - the peripatetic teacher

The experiment decided on in Morbihan, Brittany, in view of the geographical conditions - very scattered rural state schools - and peculiar local circumstances - fewer state schools than private schools already possessing infant sections - was that of peripatetic teacher. The same teacher works in 4 different single-class schools. On each visit she takes the infant section and concentrates on speech activities. She leaves work sheets with the regular teacher in charge of the single class for other activities during the week.

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(4) See Appendix I for list of regions and départements included in the Massif Central.

(5) In "Massif Central" - Dossier No. 1 - publication réalisée par la Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale en collaboration avec l'Atelier Central d'Etudes et d'Aménagement Rural du Ministère de l'Agriculture (La Documentation Française, Paris 1975).

A two-year observation period has revealed some advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages:

1. for the children: The attendance rate in the infant section is found to be highest on the day when the peripatetic teacher is there. The interest of the very young children is evident.

2. for the parents: Parents are noticeably interested in the activities of their children on that day and mothers come to talk to the visiting teacher.

3. for the school: The teaching methods employed by the peripatetic teacher are found to influence the teaching of the regular class teacher, and the facilities of the infant section are put to greater use by all.

Disadvantages:

I. Material:

a. Problems caused by the peripatetic nature of the job.

b. Problems caused by occupation of the classroom: the two teachers cannot work in the same room, and if the school has no other space available outside activities have to provide for one of the groups, with the difficulties that this involves.

II. Educational:

a. for the children of the infants section: The education they receive is bound to be fragmentary, whereas in fact, a child's activities form an educational whole. Here greater emphasis has to be placed on some activities - such as expression - to the detriment of others.

b. for the class: The children in the infants section, stimulated on certain days by special activities, become much more active even on other days of the week and this activity - although more beneficial to them - is bound to disturb the rest of the class and make teaching conditions for the single-class teacher much more difficult.

Despite the drawbacks, magnified perhaps for the purpose of this account, such pre-school teaching has, as mentioned earlier, attracted the attention of the education authorities responsible for the Massif Central.

Several schemes of this type are already in operation, and although some départements see no necessity or possibility of introducing them in the coming years, others plan to create and extend such peripatetic teaching posts in order to meet certain very specific needs.

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IInd experiment - part-time schooling

In the Aisne - a département covering the northern part of the Paris basin, made up of plains and plateaux with plentiful easy lines of communication and with rich and varied agriculture, large agricultural markets and considerable industrial activity - the geographical and economic conditions made the experiments easier, and several types were selected: peripatetic teachers, various groupings, part-time schooling, etc. Here we shall discuss part-time pre-school teaching, which in many cases, in particular in the Lozère (6), has been introduced by the Inspecteurs d'Académie in the Massif Central.

The reasons for part-time schooling are many. Firstly, there is the desire of local authorities to keep pre-school education in their own areas, even if this means maintaining a half class of between 12 and 15 pupils. Secondly, parents want to spare their very young children the inconvenience of having to travel to school. Lastly, in the département in question (Aisne having such easy communications) the absence of school canteens makes it impossible to keep children from a neighbouring locality over the lunch break.

However, bearing in mind that with part-time schooling the teacher divides her work between two communes, that it is she who travels and not the children, and that this system makes it possible to involve thirty or so infants in pre-school activities, if only part-time, it will be readily seen how these arguments led to many such schemes in the Massif Central - the Lozère and the Haute Loire - where communications are always difficult for much of the year, dwellings are scattered, and population density, particularly in the pre-school age group, is very low.

The advantages observed were identical in the Aisne and in the Massif Central. The scheme has the unanimous support of parents, who on the whole are satisfied. They feel that to take 15 children for half a day is a very positive approach and that the children benefit from pre-school education under acceptable conditions. The children evidently derive educational benefit from this part-time teaching. It must be noted however that, wherever the opportunity presented itself, parents were quick to call for full-time pre-school education.

This wish was fulfilled by the experiment at Margerides in the Corrèze.

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(6) Eight classes of this type were operating in 1975-76.

IIIrd experiment - the intermunicipal scheme at MARGERIDES, in the Corrèze

This experiment calls for a much longer account and much more detailed analysis, for four reasons:

1. It is an experiment specific to the Massif Central.

2. It provides a kind of synthesis of all the difficulties likely to be encountered in a pre-schooling scheme in a mountain area.

3. It has mobilised the efforts of various ministries (education - interior - public investments).

4. Gradually, as the difficulties have been provisionally or finally surmounted, it has provided information essential for the pursuit of a pre-schooling plan in regions with low population density.

I. Origins of the experiment

At the origin of this experiment in the Corrèze lies a two-fold concern.

Firstly, as a matter of regional planning, the Sous-Préfet of USSEL (1) wished to meet the desire of young farmers (2) on the MILLEVACHES and BORTOIS plateaux for nursery classes in their areas.

Secondly, the Inspecteur d'Académie of the Corrèze wanted to find a new method that would combine a more rational control of teaching posts with greater educational efficiency in rural areas.

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(1) Mr Lucien CHABSON.

(2) In particular the representatives of the Centre National des jeunes agriculteurs, who were to reiterate their demands during the "journées d'études" of the Centre Régional des jeunes agriculteurs du Massif Central at EGLETONS, Corrèze, on 14 and 15 March 1975: "We want our children to start out in life with the same opportunities as town children... The establishment of nursery schools in rural areas is therefore a matter of prime urgency for it represents the first stage in development ... The nursery school is a hope for the future of our children and potentially, for the future of our villages ...". Extracts from the report "La place de la femme en agriculture".

The local collaboration between these two officials soon had a follow-up in PARIS, for after a meeting held at the Ministry of Education during the first quarter, Secretary of State, Mrs PLOUX, decided to make budgetary appropriations as from the start of the school year in 1974 to launch 4 experiments in the Corrèze. The ensuing 6 months were fully taken up with planning and negotiating the 4 schemes, of which the most instructive was to be the MARGERIDES experiment (3).

II. In what way experimental?

The scheme was experimental in that the organisation and establishment of intermunicipal pre-school education was a novelty in a mountainous region.

The terrain in the MARGERIDES region consists of high plateaux, possibly less difficult of access than some regions in the Massif Central, such as the Lozère or the Cantal, but nevertheless with serious communications problems.

The climate is severe: there are many snowfalls in winter and persistent snowdrifts make travel particularly difficult.

The population is strongly characterised by a predominance of agricultural workers, in a canton with a fairly low density of between 20 and 39.9 inhabitants per km^2, and is in constant decline - 4.9% between 1968 and 1975 - with a relatively high proportion of old people (4).

The scheme was above all experimental because of its originality, involving the establishment of a nursery class in the heart of a region comprising 6 communes of less than 2,000 inhabitants. None of these communes on its own had a sufficiently large pre-school age group to warrant the opening of a nursery class, but by collecting all the children together by means of daily transport this was made feasible. However, neither the Corrèze Education Inspectorate nor the Sous-Préfecture at USSEL had an already proven model to refer to, still less any previously-tried procedure for introducing the scheme.

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(3) The other 3 experiments introduced at the start of the school year in 1974 were at SORNAC and PEYRELEVADE, in the heart of the MILLEVACHES plateau, and at AYEN in a richer and more hospitable region on the edge of Dordogne. In the main, except perhaps in the case of AYEN, they present the same features as the MARGERIDES experiment.

(4) A still lower density is to be found in the canton of SORNAC-PEYRELEVADE (10 - 19.9 inhabitants per km^2), with a steeper decline (-9.9% from 1968 to 1975) and one of the highest proportions of old people in the Massif Central - 1.40% compared to the French national average of 0.41. (For figures and percentages, cf. INSEE censuses 1968-75.)

III. Why MARGERIDES?

The official choice very quickly fell on MARGERIDES, for many reasons.

1. MARGERIDES is a large village situated on a platform crossed by the USSEL-BORT-les-ORGUES road shortly before it winds down towards the upper Dordogne valley and the BORT dam. It lies on the border of the school sectors of BORT-les-ORGUES and USSEL but has more economic dealings with the town of USSEL. Road communications are relatively easy.

2. MARGERIDES is a central point on the territory of several communes which participated in the combined pre-school scheme: to the north VEYRIERES and SAINT-BONNET-près-BORT, to the west SAINT-VICTOUR and the hamlets of LA VIALETTE and CHAUX, to the south-west SAINT-JULIEN-près-BORT, to the south SARROUX and to the north THALAMY, making a total of 6 communes fairly close to one another (5).

3. MARGERIDES possessed a new school with two classrooms beside the main road. The building was fairly new and like so many other schools in rural areas, partially unused because of the closing of one class brought about by the constant decline in the school population. The introduction of a nursery class did not call for any new construction work, although it did prove necessary to adapt the premises and furniture.

IV. The difficulties

While the choice of locality was an easy matter, difficulties very soon emerged.

They may be divided into three kinds: education, human and material (ie financial).

A. The educational difficulties:

The first question which arose was how such pre-school education should be organised in a rural area. Should it, and could it, for example, comprise the same hours and the same subject-matter as infant teaching in an urban area?

Other problems were to follow: how were young teachers, sometimes with no idea of what a rural area can be like, to be trained to deal with children with no knowledge of any other environment than their home farm?

Would it also be necessary to work out an original "rural pedagogy" different from the normal education of French nursery schools?

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(5) See school transport map (Appendix II).

B. The human difficulties:

- Doubts of parents. It may seem surprising to speak of parents' doubts when, to start with, some of them had expressed the wish for a rural nursery school. But the new schooling arrangements were to upset a good many habits. When an infant was the youngest child in a family, it was felt that the older children who had not received any pre-school education were none the worse for it; so there was no need to face up to the business of daily school travel which was sometimes so upsetting to children of that age. So to start with, mothers proved especially difficult, some of them going so far as to simply refuse to enrol their child.

- Doubts of teachers. Under French administrative procedure, the Inspecteur d'Académie must, before any new class is set up, consult the Comité Technique Paritaire Départemental which comprises education inspectors for the département, government representatives and primary teachers representing the teaching staff. The Comité Technique Paritaire of the Corrèze, without showing any particular hostility, but fearing that some of the département's budget funds would be allocated to this kind of experiment - while needs were evident in other sectors - and also that particularly difficult and unattractive working conditions might be imposed on young schoolmistresses, gave its agreement only grudgingly and reserved the right to observe the progress of the experiment before coming to a final decision on such pre-schooling schemes. In any case it pronounced its firm and unanimous opposition to any experiment which did not offer sufficient safeguards for the quality of the teaching provided (eg the project of a mobile pre-school bus).

- Doubts of local councils. It was from this quarter that the most serious reservations came: the mayors had many reasons to oppose the scheme strongly.

1. Firstly, they were afraid that in the course of two years or more of pre-schooling the children would get used to going daily to MARGERIDES and would not want to return to the commune's primary school afterwards.

In addition they feared that parents accompanying their children to the neighbouring commune might change their shopping habits and make all their purchases at MARGERIDES while waiting the end of school. For anyone knowing the importance of one household's expenditure to the budget of a poor village in some regions of the Massif Central, this was an economic worry which could not be overlooked.

2. Above all they were afraid that school numbers might fall irrevocably and result in the closure of the single-class school in their locality. Children of 5-6 years of age are admitted to school in the infant section and their numbers are included in the total of pupils subject to compulsory schooling. Many one-class schools have been saved by two or three such infants, from being closed down, especially in regions where the population density is so low that the norms for closing down cannot be observed, in which the Ministry of Education fully concurs.

The fierce determination of local councils that children should at all costs return to the village's one-class school can thus be readily understood.

3. Lastly, the mayors had financial reservations. To repeat what we said earlier, the communes on the MILLEVACHES and BORTOIS plateaux have beggarly municipal budgets. Most local representatives quite firmly refused to share in the cost of this pre-school regrouping. They found it impossible to impose financial sacrifices on their citizens for the setting-up and running of a class which would not even be situated on their own territory.

As for MARGERIDES itself, the state of its finances was such that it could barely meet the costs of its single class, and it was hard to see how it could have maintained a nursery class with all the material expense that that entails.

C. The material difficulties too were very numerous

- MARGERIDES had a new empty classroom built for primary school pupils: there was no provision for very young children and none of the equipment was designed for that purpose. A superficial inventory of requirements - quite apart from any pre-school educational material - called for the lowering of washbasins to the height of the children, the installation of more suitable lavatories and the purchase of new or more suitable furniture (beds, tables and chairs).

Setting up a class for very young children always necessitates employing a female attendant.

There was in fact a cook at MARGERIDES for the school canteen, but could she be called upon, outside the time she took to do the cooking and clean up the stoves after the meal, for the tasks of a female attendant in a nursery school, namely, assisting the teaching staff with the hygiene of the very young children and cleaning up the premises and material used by the children in their rest and play?

Although the answer to this question might be positive in certain cases, it was soon decided that it would be necessary to recruit an attendant if the experiment was to be satisfactorily conducted. But this raised the major, not to say insoluble, problem of her wages, to which we shall return in the section on the solutions adopted.

Finally, the last and not least of the material difficulties facing the organisers was the need to organise school transport.

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The parents were extremely demanding here and in many cases expected the bus not merely to stop at the nearest crossroads but to go into the farmyard to collect their child.

The map appended shows the various routes, and we will merely indicate the distances separating the different localities in the scheme from MARGERIDES:

SAINT-BONNET-près-BORT:	6.5 km
LA VIALETTE:	5 km
SAINT-JULIEN-près-BORT:	5.5 km
SARROUX:	7.5 km
BORZEIX:	11 km

Two further problems remained. Firstly, the legislation on school transport did not allow the conveyance of children of pre-school age; secondly, transporting such children called for very special supervision.

V. Solutions adopted

The solutions adopted were hardly ever found straightaway. They required repeated meetings and much re-examination of working hypotheses. They called for good will all round; many susceptibilities had to be abandoned, many discouragements had to be overlooked. The actual presence in the field of the Sous-Préfet and the Inspecteur d'Académie was necessary and sometimes of officials from the Ministry for Public Investments; together with teachers, local councillors and parents, and effective support was required from the office of the Limoges Director of Education (6), the office of the Secretary of State for Education (7) and the Rural Renewal Office (8).

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(6) In particular, Mr ABBAREDED and Mr SAUDRAY, successively Directors of Education (Recteurs) at Limoges.

(7) The experiment was monitored in the Ministry of Education by Mrs TERNY, Inspector, for Mrs LESUR, Secretary of State for pre-school education, and from the pedagogic angle by Mrs ABBADIE, Inspector General, represented in the field by Miss HERMAN, IDEN, for the Corrèze and the Cantal.

(8) For rural renewal, Mr MICHARDIERE, Commissioner for the Massif Central, was the driving force in this work.

I. SOLUTIONS TO THE EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

The first question which arose here was whether a specific teaching approach, appropriate to a rural environment, different from the traditional teaching in nursery schools, should be used in the experiment. This question immediately gives food for thought.

In answer to it three points need to be made.

Firstly, pre-school education is much more necessary, and therefore needs to be more effective, among children in the country. The results obtained underline this necessity (9).

Secondly, on arrival, the children presented a heterogeneity which undoubtedly also exists in urban nursery schools but was exacerbated here by the presence of children who, being in some cases totally isolated in their farms, had had no social contact and, at least in the early days, were enwrapped in total silence. Such heterogeneity is not the result of age differences but of the isolation of the family home; it is not the heterogeneity observable in urban pre-school education.

Thirdly, despite these behavioural differences, children receiving pre-school education in rural areas are situated at the lowest level, among pupils whose only handicap is their particular social and professional background.

This shows how strongly it was felt at the very start of the experiment that such a special context placed special demands on the schcolmistress.

But, apart from these demands, should the chosen objectives be different? A country child has similar needs to a town child: the need to communicate with others (the speech function), the need to adapt himself to society, the need for (psychomotor) structuration, the need to rationalise (sensory-motor experiences) and the need of aesthetic discovery. However, these needs are felt in varying degrees. The solution therefore was not to introduce or try out a different type of teaching but to give the young teachers who undertook this task resources specific to the purpose.

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(9) A survey carried out by the Service d'Informations Economiques et Statistiques on the schooling of some 14,000 pupils in their 7th year at school (Notes d'Information of the Ministry of Education, 14 November 1974) reveals that, while pre-school education is quite clearly beneficial whatever the child's social background, it is more effective among children from certain privileged social categories than among the children of farmers.

Moreover a very precise curve showing the proportions by social and professional origins of those who repeat a year in any given primary class, reveals that among those staying down in the preparatory course, the children of farmworkers and farmers head the list, with the sad proportion of 24% (children of industrial workers come out at 16.5% and those of office workers at 11%).

Thus, in the Corrèze all the schoolmistresses who were given posts of this kind first underwent training with a more experienced colleague in a rural infant class. They were supervised in their initial contacts and their initial difficulties as teachers by the Inspector of Nursery Schools. They knew that they could immediately call on the peripatetic teacher who had the specific task of paying attention to the teaching problems which were bound to arise.

At MARGERIDES the teacher of the single class, who was an experienced headmistress, acted as permanent adviser to the young beginning teacher.

The more general point very soon emerged that in future years further training would be necessary, and it was decided that such training would be given not only in the courses at colleges of education but also in courses in situ, indeed in courses for young student teachers in the country, on farms, leaving aside all questions of teaching, and that special emphasis would be laid on training in communication, in turning the surrounding environment to educational use, in providing information for country dwellers, in dietetics, in canteen management etc.

Other schemes may be envisaged, but the measures taken seem to have given satisfaction to all the parties concerned in the experiment, doubtless because they were based on two seemingly essential premises:

- the educational objectives assigned to rural nursery schools were to be identical with the aims in an urban environment;

- the education and methods applied were adapted to the specific needs evinced by rural children.

II. SOLUTIONS TO THE HUMAN PROBLEMS

Parents:

A number of parents, as we said earlier, had doubts about the scheme. In order to win them over, a campaign of psychological persuasion and information was launched, with gatherings held at the school in each of the localities involved in the project and even meetings in the home. Taking part in this campaign were officials from the Ministry of Education and the Sous-Préfecture (10), joined very soon after by leaders and organisers of the Centre Départemental des Jeunes Agriculteurs.

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(10) In passing, we may mention that among those seen on the job was a young trainee from the Ecole Nationale d'Administration accompanying the Inspecteur d'Académie in his efforts.

This period did not in fact last very long; mothers invited to come to the school and share for a few hours in the classroom activities of their children became enthusiastic protagonists of the scheme and played their part in persuading the last doubters.

Since then the situation has progressed considerably. Parents are regularly invited to take part with undisguised satisfaction in reports on the progress of the experiment for the benefit of visitors from outside the département (the Secretary of State, visiting officials or members from the agricultural world).

This satisfaction was reflected in a constantly increasing demand from rural circles (11), and, as a result, other projects of the MARGERIDES type followed in the years 1974-75 and 1975-76.

Teachers:

As soon as staff representatives realised that the budget items for the experimental projects were "fresh" ones - that is to say over and above the Corrèze quota, in no way jeopardising the existing pattern of schools - and as soon as they were also certain that the experiments were being conducted with all the necessary educational safeguards, the teachers made a full contribution to the scheme and, at national level, their trades union organisation, on learning the results, requested more schemes of this type.

The first teacher appointed at MARGERIDES was a young college of education graduate who chanced to be assigned to this post on the strength of her final results. In other words she did not volunteer for it. After taking a preparatory course she very soon adjusted to her class and remained in the same post the following year.

As regards the other grouping schemes in the Corrèze, it was found that while they started out with young college of education graduates appointed in the same way as the teacher at MARGERIDES, very soon afterwards older and therefore more experienced teachers applied for posts of this kind, for example, at LAPLEAU and LIGINIAC (schemes set up one or two years after MARGERIDES).

At present, when these posts become free they appear on lists of staff vacancies with indications of the particular conditions involved (see below with regard to school hours) and are applied for in the normal way.

Mayors:

As regards local councils, the work of the Sous-Préfet was decisive. He organised a multiplicity of meetings during a whole half-year and did everything possible to win the support of the mayors concerned.

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(11) See footnote No. 2.

a. Pupil numbers. It will be recalled that one of the fears of municipal authorities was the risk of their single-class schools closing down as a result of the drain of pupils to the central locality of the regrouping scheme.

In fact the problem of numbers and its solution had two sides to it.

First of all, a reasonable number of children of pre-school age had to be found before embarking on the experiment. The Sous-Préfet obtained from each commune a list of all births for the years 1969-71. He asked each mayor to contact families in order to ascertain their intentions. During this exploratory stage the mayors proved co-operative, although one of them refused to take any part in the survey in order to keep all the children in his commune - (but a year later, persuaded by the example of others and possibly also urged by parents, he joined the scheme, thereby appreciably increasing its numbers).

When the potential number of infants between the ages of 2 and 4 was ascertained, it was possible to deal with a second problem: the mayors' demand that children should come back to the one-class school when they were 5 years old. It was therefore agreed that pupils should return to the infant section as soon as they had turned 5. This doubtless reassured the mayors but was certainly not a good educational solution, for after experiencing the richness of an education that utilised all the potential offered by the teaching in French nursery schools, the child returned to a class containing several streams, where of course, as his section was not the prime centre of interest of the master or mistress, he was bound to get bored.

The real solution was found, thanks to the success of the experiment two years later, at the start of the 1975-76 school year, when around the central nucleus of MARGERIDES where the nursery school was held, classes were reorganised according to level, each commune agreeing to turn its single class into a homogeneous class (preparatory, elementary or intermediate) and parents accepting the inconvenience of their children having to travel to school for the sake of the advantage of less fragmentary and more effective teaching in a class "just like in town". Here again, safeguards had to be provided that the classes thus created would survive, but that is another matter.

b. Finance. Although the Sous-Préfet of USSEL and the Inspecteur d'Académie succeeded through patience and diplomacy in reconciling different interests and imposing on all as the most rational solution, the choice of MARGERIDES for the project, it very soon became apparent that the financial problems would have been insoluble without the action of the Commission for Town and Country Planning and Regional Action and, more specifically, the aid of the Rural Renewal Office.

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In view of the quite obvious inadequacy of local budgets, the Rural Renewal Office made an allocation which was absolutely essential to get the experiment started and especially as a quite exceptional initial measure, to enable MARGERIDES to pay responsibility for the female attendant's wages (12).

It should be noted that the solution adopted, while simple in theory, was quite difficult to apply because administratively it was far from easy to use an appropriation from the budget of the Ministry of the Interior to supplement that of the Ministry of Education for a school experiment. In order to overcome the difficulty it was necessary to add a special budget item with the agreement of the Secretariat of State for pre-school education, the Commission for Town and Country Planning and Regional Action and the Ministry of Finance (13).

III. SOLUTIONS TO THE MATERIAL PROBLEMS

State financial aid was thus assured for the MARGERIDES experiment and from then on it was easier to tackle the material problems. But that in no way means that the financial problem was not approached differently at MARGERIDES and elsewhere. We shall come back to this in connection with the wages of the female attendant, because a solution to the financial problem is a "sine qua non" for the spread of nursery schools in rural areas.

Conversion of premises

At the outset of the experiment, at the start of the 1973-74 school year, MARGERIDES had, as we have said, an unused classroom in good repair, with a wide, light, airy corridor. The part of this corridor beyond the classroom door was closed off by a thick curtain and turned into a "rest room" with small camp beds.

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(12) As a guide, it may be mentioned that the total grant from the Commissariat à la Rénovation Rurale amounted to 160,000 Frs. for all the Corrèze experiments during the 1974 financial year.

(13) This was announced by Mrs LESUR, Secretary of State, in a speech at LIGINIAC, Corrèze, on 21 November 1974:

"In the département of the Corrèze, this payment (to the female attendant has caused problems of which you are aware, but to which I am providing a solution. My next budget, in section 43-31 entitled 1st and 2nd level education, sundry inducements, will include an additional item headed 'Pre-elementary teaching experiment in a rural area'.

This pro memoria item will receive funds transferred from various budgets, with which my department will furnish the aid promised to you.

Materially this will represent substantial assistance".

During the teacher's preparatory course, before the scheme started, two "nursery" size lavatories were substituted for two of the existing ones. And to enable the children to reach the basins and turn the taps a big wooden platform was put in.

Furniture ordered was supplied in the course of 1974 and 1975 since when the classroom and school have acquired a more normal "nursery school" appearance (14).

The role of the female attendant

We mentioned in the description of the problems that it was decided at MARGERIDES - in order to give the experiment the best possible chance - to employ a female attendant as well as the cook who already worked in the school. But it must be borne in mind that in a region with a low population density, or elsewhere in any situation other than an experimental one, a female attendant's wages are a very heavy if not impossible burden on the community. Hence the need to employ her in a rural combined pre-schooling system in a different manner from a town nursery group.

For this reason, taking into account the financial circumstances of rural communes, the particular conditions of pre-schooling in such areas (transport, lunch away from home etc) and the relatively low numbers in the classes, it was proposed for the other Corrèze schemes and future schemes in the Massif Central that the female attendant should be called upon, wherever necessary or desirable, to perform transport supervisory duties, cook and assist the teacher at mealtimes.

Provision for the female attendant's wages

This is undoubtedly the heaviest item of expenditure for a rural commune and many pre-school schemes have fallen through because it was impossible for certain communities to meet it.

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(14) Apart from the example of MARGERIDES described here the conversion of premises and furniture called forth much ingenuity and devotion.

At AYEN a second empty room was turned into a play room; at LAPLEAU, the municipality converted a filing room adjoining the infant classroom; at LIGINIAC a young architect completely transformed the old "Jules Ferry type" school and installed functional, aesthetic and modern amenities which are much admired by visitors. With regard to the furniture, quite apart from the many alterations to tables and chairs carried out by local craftsmen, by the teacher's husband or by parents, it is worth relating that the rest room at SORNAC was first equipped with stretchers from the local fire station.

Therefore it is not enough to relate that at MARGERIDES the problem was solved by the exceptional grant from the Commission for Town and Country Planning and Regional Action and the Rural Renewal Office - even though this grant was repeated for other experiments of the same type, as in LOZERE.

Other answers to the problem must also be examined, in particular the generous and original solution arrived at in combined pre-school schemes presenting characteristics in common with those of the Corrèze experiments, namely the rural nursery schools at LOUDUN in the département of Vienne.

The Loudun solution

a. The "solidarity syndicate"

In February 1973, on the initiative of the commune of Loudun, a "Syndicat de la Solidarité" was set up. The idea of the promoter (15) was to organise the communes of the canton around the town of Loudun and, from this locality which possessed relatively solid financial resources, bring the rural communes the benefit of a redistribution of facilities and amenities which they could not contemplate on their own. The income of the syndicate came from contributions by the communes in proportion to their population. It is worth noting the generosity of the authorities and citizens of LOUDUN, who bear the main brunt of the expenditure without deriving any particular benefit from it, since the whole budget is allocated to the rural communes. Thus for the 1974 budget the contribution was fixed at 6 francs per head. LOUDUN supplied 44,766 francs and the rural communes as a whole 21,702 francs, making a total of 66,468 francs available to the rural communes.

In 1975 the contribution was raised to 10 francs per head.

b. The activities of the syndicate

These are considerable in pre-school education alone. The syndicate has made it possible to settle the troublesome problem for small communities of the female attendant's wages. It was also covered capital costs and the cost of school and pre-school transport in the canton.

This is undoubtedly an excellent solution to all the financial problems that a pre-school education plan in a sparsely-populated rural area can give rise to (16).

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(15) Senator MONORY, Mayor of LOUDUN.

(16) The town of LOUDUN has published an information brochure, "Le Syndicat de Solidarité ou l'Egalité des Chances" in which all the pre-school schemes covered are described in detail.

While such an effective arrangement as the "Syndicat de la Solidarité de Loudun" is not possible in every case, it may be said that, at the present stage of pre-school education schemes, it is absolutely essential to set up an intermunicipal syndicate with funds to meet the financial requirements of a combined scheme for school or pre-school education (17).

Thus most of the pre-school schemes planned or implemented in the 1975-76 MASSIF CENTRAL programme concern pupils from communes already associated in an intermunicipal syndicate.

Transport

As we have seen, parents proved demanding on the question of school transport. So were the authorities. The Inspecteur d'Académie made it a rule that school transport should not be a cause of exhaustion for infants. This meant that they must not leave home very early in the morning or return very late in the evening. The time spent waiting for the vehicle must not be too long. The journey must not take longer than 20 or 25 minutes. Lastly, supervision appropriate to the children's age must be provided in the vehicle.

The principal means adopted to meet these requirements, were two original solutions which met with very great success at MARGERIDES and were advocated and applied in other combined pre-school schemes in the MASSIF CENTRAL.

a. An uninterrupted day at school

It was decided that the infant class should not begin until 10 am in order to let the very young children get the maximum benefit from their hours of sleep, (arrangements being made to receive children from 9.30 am onwards for the sake of those who left home earliest or lived nearest).

It was accepted that mealtimes should be a period of education. This was not a matter of pure form, for the children's education actually continued at table (acquisition of elementary manners, habits of cleanliness etc).

Lastly, class was to end at 4 pm so that the journey home could take place in daylight and in satisfactory conditions.

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(17) Extract from the statutes of the "Syndicat intercommunal de CRESSENSAC", deposited with the Préfecture of the LOT: "Article 2: the purpose of the syndicate is to set up and run a rural nursery class for boys and girls of two years of age and over in the communes belonging to the syndicate.

This new school timetable received the assent of parents (18) and teachers, and now, when a post of this kind is advertised for 1st flevel teachers, the vacancy is listed as a pre-school post with continuous working day.

b. Radial transport

Instead of the conventional route from point A to point E via points B, C and D, which is always too long and wearisome for the first children to be collected and the last to be put down, the idea was conceived of several vehicles leaving peripheral points A, B, C and D simultaneously for the central point E. (The reader will understand more readily by referring to the diagram in Appendix II.)

This meant using several minibus type vehicles instead of a normal bus. These vehicles were approved by the Préfecture and the Directorate of Public Investments. In some cases the driver was none other than a mother holding a regular public transport licence and paid in the normal way from the département's school transport budget. This solution helped greatly to solve the problem of the children's supervision during the journey. But even with professional drivers, the transportation and the inevitable halts for the very young, who are always taken short while travelling, never caused any problems.

Two further considerations need to be discussed if the question of school transport is to be covered fully: the length of the journey and the cost of the operation.

1. The length of the journey

As we have seen (p. 11), the distances between the furthest pick-up points and the school at MARGERIDES varied from 5 to 11 km. In fact, the children's distance from the centre should not be judged in kilometres but by the duration of the journey, which depends on local topography, traffic difficulties etc. The ideal is that all the starting-points on the periphery should be situated on an "isochronic" line not exceeding a journey time of 20 to 25 minutes under normal conditions. ./.

(18) However, it must be noted that the starting time of 10 am, which is quite convenient for mothers in the heart of the country, could not be adopted in the scheme around AYEN, where part of the population, although living in the country, work in factories, and mothers could not leave their children unattended from 8 am to 10 am.

This detail suffices to show how difficult it is to deduce a general rule for pre-school education in rural areas.

2. The cost of transport

Obviously a radial system of collection and transport costs much more than the conventional system. For the MARGERIDES experiment the ministry first granted a 65% subsidy, which was very soon raised to 100%. A look at the transport statistics (Appendix III) suffices to show that the cost price is beyond the budget of a commune in a rural area. It must be borne in mind that the scheme in question is a prototype, so to speak, in which everything possible has been done to ensure that transport conditions are optimal.

In most pre-schooling in the MASSIF CENTRAL, costs are less high and fall very rapidly when the children are allowed to travel in the same vehicles as older children.

In any case, the Ministry of Education is resolved to make the effort of increasing its subsidy. The general official rate will be 65%. The councils of the départements and local authorities are being asked to join in, so as to relieve parents entirely, in the fairly near future, of the cost of school transport for their children.

Rural nursery schools as a centre of interest for mothers

After discussing the solutions found to the various problems, it seems equally important to show in what measure an answer has been given to the demand by the President of the Republic that the plan should "not confine itself rigidly to children's education, but ... endeavour to make the nursery school a centre of interest for mothers, particularly in the least populated areas, where it will thus help to combat isolation".

The MARGERIDES experiment has shown that a combined pre-schooling scheme could certainly achieve this objective. One sign of this is the number of preparatory meetings it led to, at which the mothers, although timid at first and hardly daring to open their mouths, ended up by realising that they were not alone in their fears. Gradually it was observed that they were making contact and apparently deriving great pleasure from talking together about their little ones.

Further evidence was afforded by the need very soon felt among the younger, and also the more aware, of them not to remain passive towards this pre-school education of their children. Since then the habit has grown up - and there have been many reports of this - of coming to consult the teacher to find out what they should "teach" the children at home. Sometimes they wanted to know what book to buy, sometimes they wanted details of a record so that at home the children could go on learning a song begun in class. Very soon the Inspector of Nursery Schools found it necessary to arrange mothers' meetings with specific objectives: children's health, dietetics, choice of books and records.

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Lastly, a number of open days were held, not only at MARGERIDES but in the other pre-school centres. Several visits by teachers, farming representatives and local councillors were arranged. On each occasion a great many, if not all, mothers came and talked at length about matters which had now become their province.

On learning of this new trend in the experiment, the Secretariat of State for pre-school education sent along a technical adviser who met farming representatives in order to find means of institutionalising these links between education and country families. It appears, however, that here the results have been less positive, because the farming leaders are mistrustful of over-great influence on the part of teachers.

Nonetheless, there is on-the-spot evidence that a combined pre-school education scheme arouses the interest and sympathy not only of the parents, local councillors and teachers concerned but of the entire population (19).

PART II

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE MASSIF CENTRAL AFTER THE FIRST EXPERIMENTS

The benefit of the pre-school education experiments in the CORREZE and elsewhere soon reached Paris through two channels: the Ministry of Education (Regional Inspectorate, Regional Directorate and Secretariat of State) and the Ministry of the Interior (Préfecture, Rural Renewal Office and Commission for Town and Country Planning and Regional Action).

At the same time, rural organisations took a lively interest in the question, with surveys by the planning offices of the Ministry of Agriculture, the seminar of the Centre National des Jeunes Agriculteurs on 14 and 15 March 1975 at EGLETONS, the work carried out by the National Confederation for Rural Development with the participation of education department officials and its national seminar (19-20 February 1976).

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(19) For example, a senior citizens' club at SAINT DEZERY devoted itself to fitting up the rural nursery school, and the grandmothers knitted blankets for the rest room.

The Sous-Préfet of USSEL even requested that some old persons should be allowed to have their meals with the children. For various reasons it was not possible to accede to this request.

Several articles and reports have been based on the conclusions drawn from field work (20).

The Inspecteurs d'Académie of the Massif Central meeting in a working party under the effective chairmanship of the Clermont Recteurs (directors of education) (21), have held a series of discussions based on the initial results at MARGERIDES, with a view to developing pre-schooling in their region (22).

Thus when, in this context of general interest in pre-elementary schooling in rural areas, the demands of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister (23) under the Massif Central development plan became known most of the conditions already existed to ensure that pre-school education played the large part assigned to it.

I. The work at CLERMONT, or theoretical proposals

A synopsis of the work carried out by the Inspecteurs d'Académie of the Massif Central is to be found in the report by MAZURIE (24) on "Pre-school education in rural areas" published by the CLERMONT Académie.

The Inspecteurs d'Académie of the regions concerned set out to define the appropriate institutional framework and educational direction for the new structures for children of pre-school age.

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(20) In particular:

- Le maintien et l'amélioration des services publics dans les zones à faible densité de population, by DUCHENE-MARULLAZ and ZWICKERT, in "La Documentation Française", PARIS July 1976;

- Zones rurales en voie de dévitalisation (Ministère de l'Education, Direction Générale de la Programmation et de la coordination, 30 April 1975).

(21) Successively Mr VERGUIN and Mr DISCHAMPS.

(22) The working party met twice at CLERMONT-FERRAND. A restricted meeting of the Recteurs of the Massif Central Académies was held at TOULOUSE on 28 October 1975.

(23) Cf. p. 1.

(24) Inspecteurs d'Académie of the Haute-Loire

They began by analysing the concept of a rural area in the Massif Central. They considered that such an area was above all one where the main human and economic activities were in the primary sector, thus rejecting the usual classification adopted by demographers and sociologists, who took account only of the population figure for a commune to decide whether it was urban or rural.

Pointing out that in the Massif Central, particularly in the mountain cantons of Auvergne, the rural phenomenon was complicated by isolation and communication difficulties, they concluded that certain proposals for pre-school establishments which were viable in areas of easy movement (as in the case of MARGERIDES) became impossible, not to say utopian, in high-lying regions.

They observed that in areas with a very low population density it was questionable whether any combined scheme was necessary. For example, a study made in the arrondisement of YSSINGEAUX showed that three schools existed in an area of approximately 100 km^2 but the school population was so low that the figures were about 0.21 pupils per km^2.

Were combined schemes possible and reasonable under such conditions?

These considerations gave rise to a number of ideas:

a. The administrative norms with regard to minimum class size were questioned. For a school with 2 classes the law requires a minimum of 26 pupils. It is quite obvious that in areas with scattered settlements and a low population density this figure is much too high. It therefore seems advisable not to lay down any minimum number but to consider needs and analyse each situation individually.

b. It was felt that the combined pre-school class should be administratively independent of the primary school to which it was attached, as should also the present infant classes incorporated in an elementary group, which could become independent one-class nursery schools under the responsibility of a single schoolmistress. This principle was based on several arguments:

- the special nature of the teaching methods and the originality of the subject-matter;
- the special nature of the school hours in some cases;
- the different nature of the essential financial needs (experience shows that the infant classes of primary groups have very limited resources).

c. Attention was drawn to the premises and amenities required for the establishment of a pre-school class:

- two rooms: one for activities, the other for rest or play;
- appropriate sanitary installations;
- suitable furniture.

d. In some cases different school hours were necessary: in the light of the MARGERIDES experiment, although the different hours cannot be applied systematically (cf. the problem at AYEN, footnote No. 18), it seemed appropriate in order to mitigate the effects of travelling, to advocate without a break, wherever possible, the hours 10 am - 4 pm.

e. Some inspectors mentioned the need to adjust school holidays as well as the working day. Without altering the length of the holidays, school terms should be longer in summer and shorter in winter, when the exceptional climatic conditions in certain regions of the Massif Central prevented optimal schooling.

f. At least two inspectors (Loire and Haute-Loire) asked that it should be possible to adopt another form of pre-schooling - the "nursery school on the farm" - for the most isolated regions, with the use of radio and television and home visits by the specialist woman teacher.

Thus the Loire Inspector proposed for his own département, the appointment of two teachers, highly qualified for such work, to an assignment of this kind in the MONTS du FOREZ and the MASSIF du PILAT. In his view, these temporary posts (for one or two years) should carry the same status as a peripatetic teacher.

The Inspector for the Haute-Loire proposed conducting two "nursery school on the farm" experiments in the south-east of his département (25).

g. Exceptional allocations were felt to be necessary, any innovation in pre-schooling called for substantial funds having regard to the small income of rural communes. This certainly required state intervention, and possibly intervention by the region. Establishment of a syndicate of communes was essential.

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(25) These two experiments were begun in 1975-76. Only the second is still going on. In the hamlet of LES VASTRES (commune of VASTRE), two rooms were converted in a farm, for six pupils with a part-time woman teacher; this experiment lasted only one year (1975-76).

In the hamlet of LES BALAYES (commune of CHAMP CLAUSE), six pupils with a part-time teacher in 1975-76 and a full-time teacher in 1976-77, use two rooms in a farm, with a contribution of 20% of the conversion cost from the Direction Départementale de l'Agriculture. The parents reacted very favourably.

h. The importance of subsidising school transport was emphasised by all the inspectors, who urged the need both to increase the state's financial contribution and to amend existing legislation for while expenditure on pre-schooling experiments was provided for in the budget of the Ministry of Education, pupils of nursery schools were excluded from the benefit of school transport and the relevant subsidies.

i. Finally, as regards the educational orientation of pre-schooling in the Massif Central, the MAZURIE report states:

> "There can be no doubt that the young in our country areas have a different attitude to school from town children. The teacher's approach must be based upon very close observation of his pupils in order to make the most of the opportunities for discovering their world, which is generally confined to their immediate natural surroundings. Hence the importance of nature study as well as the acquisition of language and co-ordinated motor activities.
>
> While it is right, as in any consistent educational approach, to build upon what the child already knows, it is desirable that he should be led to widen his scope and, in this particular instance, to discover the outside world, so that his integration into a different world may, when the time comes, be the easier.
>
> To their own spontaneous discoveries must be added the knowledge which will give children in our rural areas an idea of the world in which he might have to live and make a place for himself. Though he may have discovered many things for himself, it will be well to lead him to discover little by little the logical links between these diverse manifestations of life.
>
> It should be remembered that one of the aims of education is adaptation to different circumstances and surroundings whose impact can be met without harm thanks to the personal resources of the individual.
>
> The fundamental role of language is immediately obvious. There are still many rural areas in which there is used a local dialect that is thoroughly familiar to the children since they have heard it from birth. It will therefore be necessary to provide them with a simple lexical and syntactical grounding so that they do not find themselves confronted by a foreign language when they arrive in town.

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All educational methods are permissible - learning by permeation, imititation, oral repetition and structural exercises. The child must also be familiarised with the customs of town life (style of dress, use of well-conducted school canteens which will accustom him to a balanced diet often different from that of his original background).

This preparation for adaptation is all the more important because it is known that the rural population is declining and the child will perhaps be called upon to adopt a way of life essentially different from that with which he is now familiar.

This new type of school is therefore concerned to provide education that will open up the mind, prepare the child for society (the two are not contradictory) and make him aware of his potential, rather than awaken his senses and wait on his development".

II. Achievements in the field

In 1974-75

The experiments at MARGERIDES and the three other centres of SORNAC, PEYRELEVADE and AYEN were closely followed by the country people of the Corrèze and their neighbours in the CANTAL. The people and their representatives, having become aware of the problem and interested in the first favourable results, followed up their initial interest and goodwill with requests for further centres.

In September 1974 a second generation of combined pre-school schemes was introduced in the CORREZE, again with the help of the State Secretariat (which allocated four posts), at LAPLEAU, EYGURANDE and SALON-LA-TOUR. A second class proved to be necessary at AYEN.

But two other combined schemes started, with the département's funds and the goodwill of the mayors, at LIGINIAC and LAGRAULIERE. These made it possible to maintain a class, to increase the intake of children by adding those of pre-school age and to improve the quality of teaching in the school through the creation of a special infant class.

In CANTAL the combined schemes and PAULHAC, at an altitude of 1,150 metres, and SAINT BONNET de CONDAT followed the creation of the nursery class at RUYNES (altitude - 1,000 metres) opened on 2 October 1973 (26).

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(26) See tables appended for the CORREZE and CANTAL schemes.

In 1975-76

Pre-schooling in the MASSIF CENTRAL assumed a quite different dimension. Within the general framework of the MASSIF CENTRAL plan, the Ministry of Education undertook an extensive programme.

Five million francs were made available under the economic support plan and two millions came from the Commission for Town and Country Planning and Regional Action.

These appropriations, wholly devoted to pre-elementary education, made it possible to meet functional and capital expenditure often simultaneously.

68 schemes were approved, with new buildings for 42 classes and 7 canteens catering for numbers between 20 and 150.

Funds were provided for 41 classroom conversions, making it possible to install infant classes in vacated primary school buildings.

Financial assistance for school transport was granted, in most cases in the form of a starting grant but sometimes also as a contribution to the purchase of a bus. Six communes or groups of communes were assisted in this way.

In addition, a subsidy covering the wages of a female attendant for one year was granted to 22 local authorities.

A glance at these figures shows the extent to which functional assistance and capital appropriations have been combined, thanks to the flexibility in use of the appropriation from the Regional Planning Fund.

Finally, it should be noted that a special appropriation of 200,000 F from the Regional Planning Fund made possible the purchase of two buses equipped for educational services to isolated schools. Two teaching posts were made available in order to establish the two liaison teams using these vehicles.

In the field, these figures are reflected in the following schemes projected or realised:

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LIMOGES ACADEMIE

CORREZE

4 new combined pre-schooling schemes

SAINT DEZERY
SAINT VIANCE
SAINT CHAMANT
SAINT de LAPLEAU (this scheme makes pre-school education available to an entire canton, that of LAPLEAU, with a very low population density)

CREUSE

2 classes opened in rural areas

CROZANT
SARDENT

HAUTE VIENNE

BELLAC: nursery school with 3 classes
CHALUS: nursery school with 2 classes

CLERMONT ACADEMIE

PUY DE DOME

BORT-L'ETANT: combined scheme for 3 rural communes
AUBIAT: intermunicipal infant class (for 3 communes)

ALLIER

BEAULON: 3rd infant class

CANTAL

POLMINHAC: pre-schooling scheme for 2 further villages
PAULHAC: pre-schooling for one rural commune

HAUTE LOIRE

SAINT JULIEN CHAPTEUIL: improvement of arrangements for children of pre-school age
SAINT FERREOL d'AUROURE: equipment of a canteen
SAINT GERMAIN LAPRADE: equipment of a playroom for the infant class

LES VASTRES and CHAMPCLAUSE) farm school experiments

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MONTPELLIER ACADEMIE

LOZERE

ALBARET-SAINTE-MARIE and FOURNELS: opening in each of these communes of a part-time nursery class under the same peripatetic teacher

MALBOUZON: nursery class through conversion of a primary classroom

NASBINALS: increased capacity for children brought by their parents

BLEYMARD: change-over from a part-time class to a full-time nursery class

BAGNOLS-LES-BAINS: do

COLLET-DE-DEZE: conversion of premises + part-time female attendant

SAINT-ETIENNE-VALLEE FRANCAISE: do

MONASTIER: do

PONT DE MONTVERT: do

COCURES: do

SAINT ENIMIE: nursery-size furniture + full-time female attendant

CHANAC: do

ST. GERMAIN DE CALBERTE: do

MASSEGROS: payment of female attendant

CHAUDEYRAC: purchase of furniture and teaching material

LA CANOURGUE: do

BASSENAC: do

BADAROUX: furniture + female attendant

TOULOUSE ACADEMIE

AVEYRON

LA PRIMAUBE DE LUC: construction of a nursery classroom and if possible two elementary classrooms

SEDAZAC-CONCOURES: two nursery classes and three elementary classes if possible

SAINT CHRISTOPHE: nursery class and two elementary classes; the commune would only undertake the scheme provided it could have both

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LOT

PRADINES LABERAUDIE:	concerted planning area, 2nd instalment school group 2 nursery classes
PRAYSSAC:	4 nursery classes
GOURDON:	2 nursery classes
SAINT-CERE:	2 nursery classes

TARN

Amalgamation of single-class schools at LE BEZ; setting-up of an additional nursery-school class at the hamlet of GUYOR in LE BEZ commune.

LYON ACADEMIE

LOIRE

CLEPPE, SAINTE FOY, SAINT SULPICE:	conversion of an elementary class into a combined nursery class
SAINT CYR DE VALORGES:	combined pre-school scheme with SAINT COLOMBE SUR GAND
VALEILLES:	conversion of an elementary class, with combined scheme
CIVENS:	do
SAINT PAUL EN CORNILLON:	construction of an infant classroom

RHONE

BIBOST:	construction of an infant classroom
LES MAIES:	setting-up of an intermunicipal infant class
LENTILLY:	building of a nursery school with 3 classrooms to replace unsuitable infant classrooms
SAINTE CONSORCE:	building of an infant classroom
GREZIEN LA VARENNE:	extension of the nursery school (2 classrooms)
CHASSELAY:	building of 2 infant classrooms
LA TOUR DE SALVAGNY:	building of a nursery school with 4 classrooms

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CONCLUSION

After a phase of very localised schemes, with the start of the 1975-76 school year pre-schooling assumed a new dimension as part of governmental efforts to further the general development of this region.

Several conclusions are inescapable at the end of these two experimental years.

The most important is that it has not been and will not be possible to do anything in this field without very considerable financial aid from the state. We have seen the sums involved, and they far exceed the financial means of rural communes.

A contribution by the region, département and local authorities, alongside that of the state, is equally essential. It is unlikely to be possible to set up any more pre-school centres or to open any new nursery classes without first creating intermunicipal syndicates.

A fundamental lesson is that the promotion of pre-schooling calls for all-round effort and participation.

A further conclusion is that, despite the success of combined experiments in sparsely-populated regions, there can be no generalised solution. Every installation, every combination and every scheme must take account of local conditions, circumstances and resources. Whether a combination of communes, part-time schooling, a peripatetic teacher or schooling on farms is chosen, the choice will be made advisedly in each département by the Inspecteur d'Académie assisted by his joint technical committee.

The diversity of the solutions adopted shows clearly that there is not and cannot be any preconceived approach.

Another comment which is called for is that the nursery schools thus set up have duly fulfilled the constant functions of pre-school education: the first rudiments of education, the first intellectual challenges, the first appeals to creativity, the first artistic awakenings, the first steps towards mastery of psycho-motor equilibrium, the first understanding of the bodily system and the first efforts at socialisation. But over and above this, as specific instances show, they have also served another purpose of nursery schools, namely the early detection of handicaps. At MARGERIDES in particular, the abnormal silence on certain occasions of one little girl was noticed, and treatment by specialists at the Medico-Psycho-Educational Centre at TULLE enabled an abnormality to be arrested which, if treated too late, would have been irreversible.

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A fourth observation is that, with the authorisation of the Secretariat of State for pre-school education and the Ministry of Education, administrative flexibility has made extremely positive schemes and innovations possible. We have already mentioned the "school on the farm" system, but another example can be put forward in this context. This concerns the inter-académie agreement and the creation of a syndicate of communes which resulted in the nursery school at CRESSENAC serving the communes of CRESSENAC, CUZANCE, SIGNAC and SARRASAC in the département of LOT and of ESTIVALS and NESPOULS in the département of Corrèze, breaking down the formerly rigid administrative boundaries of two départements belonging to two different regions (LIMOUSIN and MIDI-PYRENEES) and to two different académies (LIMOGES and TOULOUSE). Similar flexibility has also made it possible to diversify schemes as part of the revitalisation of rural areas. At SAINT DEZERY, for example, the nursery school is open whereas the local primary school is closed and takes children from the urban periphery of USSEL (USSEL and SAINT DEZERY being twinned and transport provided by the commune of USSEL).

One last finding to be mentioned, again in the context of revitalisation of rural areas, is that the role of the rural nursery school as a centre of interest for mothers is beginning to be fulfilled (as we saw at MARGERIDES) and that further efforts are being made in this direction, in particular at POLMINHAC in CANTAL, where a training scheme for mothers is planned.

Does this now mean that the development of pre-school education in the MASSIF CENTRAL has met with such success that it is able to retain - as was hoped in the Corrèze area around MARGERIDES - a large rural population?

One must guard against any pretentious illusion here. The possibilities for pre-schooling are too limited especially where the degree of population decline has been too great. In fact, below a certain level the difficulties are insurmountable and it seems clear that it is virtually pointless to try to do anything.

The goal and objectives of the Ministry of Education are on another level. They are simple but impressive:

To give country families the assurance of pre-schooling, followed by schooling, of a good standard;

To enable country children to develop in a nursery school "just like in town";

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To give them a harmonious education which does not alienate them from their background but helps them to understand and appreciate it more.

Lastly and above all, to enable children born in an underprivileged area to experience in the nursery school and all their further studies, the equality of opportunity which the ministry has set itself as its objective and which every teacher seeks for them.

If, once this equality of opportunity is secured, country people no longer wish to leave the land to make something of their lives and those of their children, then pre-school education will, in its own field, have had the merit of making its own contribution to maintaining a public service, improving education and thereby improving the quality of life, which is still tough and hard, in the sparsely-populated regions which make up the MASSIF CENTRAL.

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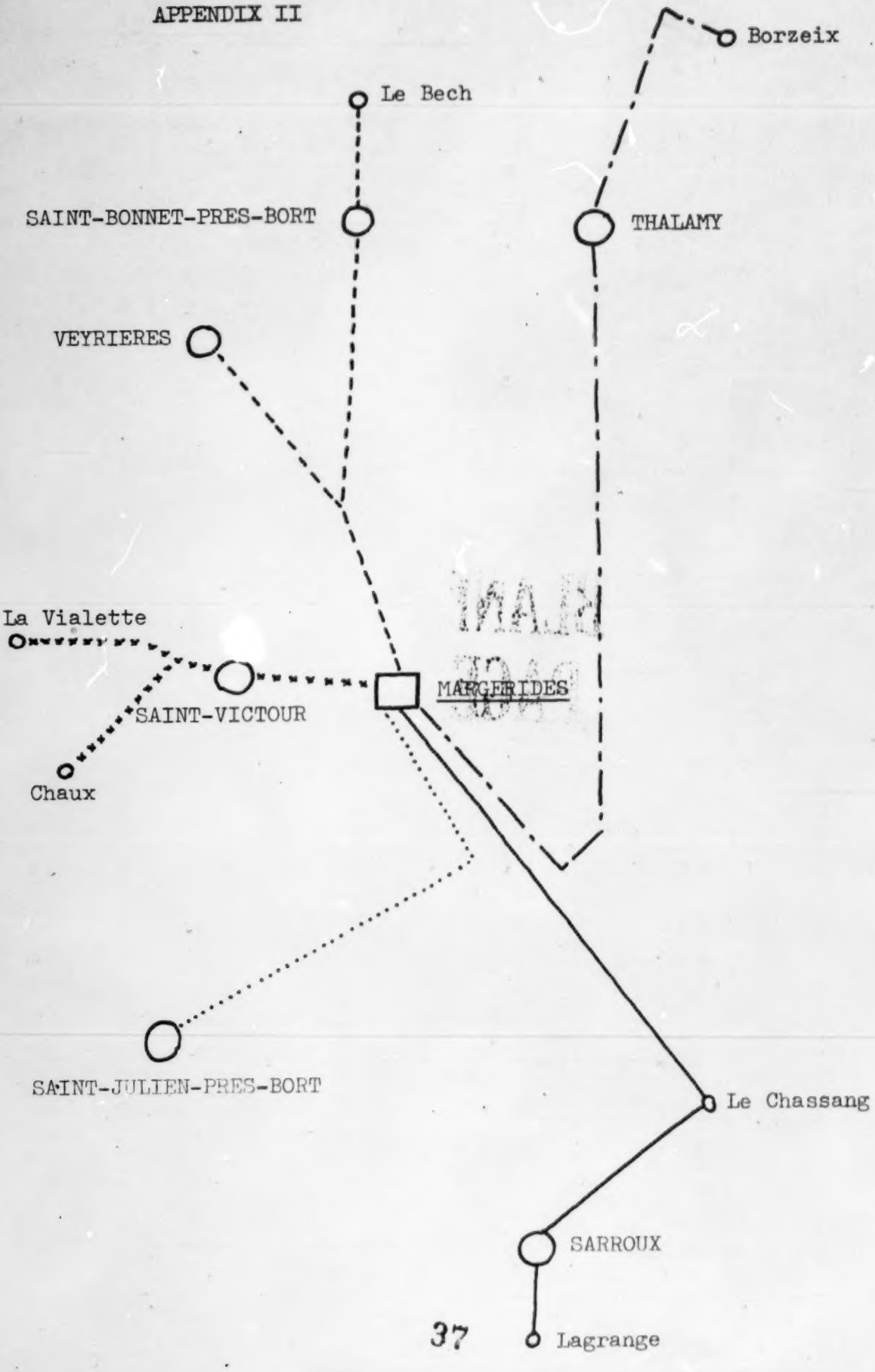
APPENDIX II


Borzeix
Le Bech
SAINT-BONNET-PRES-BORT
THALAMY
VEYRIERES
La Vialette
MARGERIDES
SAINT-VICTOUR
Chaux
SAINT-JULIEN-PRES-BORT
Le Chassang
SARROUX
Lagrange

APPENDIX III

LIMOGES Académie INSPECTION ACADEMIQUE OF CORREZE

Commune	Circuit	No. of pupils carried	km daily	daily cost	Daily cost per pupil	Annual cost per pupil	School year
MARGERIDES	1. Thalamy, Barzeix, Thalamy Pradeix, La Bournerie, Cros Jeux, Margerides, Thalamy						Ran from 22.10 in
	2. Margerides, St-Victour, Chaux, La Vialatte, Le Monteil, Le Verdier Margerides, Prameix, Margerides	18	280 (2)	163.77	9.09	1,354.41 (149 j)	1973-74
	3. La Grange, Sarroux, Le Chassang, Le Peuch, Margerides	24	280	260.00	10.83	1,873.59 (173 j)	1974-75
	4. Nuzejoux, St Julien près Bort, Liginiac, Les Baraques, Margerides	24	280	279.80	11.66	1,993.86 (171 j)	1975-76
	5. St Bonnet, Le Bech Lafouillerie, St Bonnet; Veyrière, Margerides St Bonnet						Ran from 17.11 in
AYEN	1. Ayen, Frabet, L'Hermitanie, Yssandon, La Ferradie, La Madalie, Ayen	36	54	156.18	4.33	567.23 (131 j)	1973-74
	2. Ayen, St Robert, Ayen, La Carteyrie, Chez Minet, Vars, La Ressendie,	27	54	163.28	6.04	1,044.92 (173 j)	1974-75
	St Cyprien, Chez Thomas, Le Bournas, Ayen	34	112	324.00	9.52	1,627.92 (171 j)	1975-76 (1)

(1) Alteration of circuits at the start of the school year in September 1975.

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(2) This is the figure in the agreement between the Préfecture and the carrier. In terms of children's travel, it must be interpreted as follows: $\frac{280}{2}$ (allowing for empty journeys)= 140 km a day, divided into 5 circuits, or on average $\frac{140}{5x2}$ = 14 km per journey.

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FIRST "GENERATION" OF INTERMUNICIPAL PRE-SCHOOL SCHEMES SIMULTANEOUS WITH MARGERIDES (1973-74)

	S O R N A C	P E Y R E L E V A D E	M A R G E R I D E S	A Y E N 1 and 2
Date of start of class	16.10.73	7.10.73	22.10.73	1st class: 13.9.73 2nd class: 13.9.74
Hours	9 am - 12 pm 1.30 pm - 4.30 pm	9 am - 12 pm 1.30 pm - 4.30 pm	10 am - 4 pm Here the meal is regarded as teaching time, during which the teacher fulfils her educational role	9 am - 12 pm 1 pm - 4 pm
No. of pupils	22	15	26	55
Premises	Spacious work room containing a "movable" rest corner - no playroom - schoolyard used Building of a nursery classroom planned			2 work rooms - play and rest room common to both classes
Sanitary installations	Provision made for functional installations	Installed at the end of the 1st term 1973	Installed in November 1973	1st installation in January 1974, in course of installation for the 2nd class
Teaching material	Educational supplies and games are gradually bought or delivered - needs are obviously still very great			On order for the 2nd class - still insufficient
Furniture	Functional furniture delivered at the beginning of the 2nd term	Functional furniture delivered in December 1973	Functional furniture delivered in January 1974	Delivered 8.11.73 for the 1st class - on order for the 2nd, still to be delivered
Female attendant	1 during school hours	2 persons: 1 in the morning, the cook in the afternoon	1 person 7 hours a day	9 hours a day
Transport Insurance and supervision are the responsibility of the carrier	Inquiry by préfecture in progress for neighbouring communes. Taxi used for 1 child	3 circuits - the children travel by car with those in the primary classes	6 communes involved - the children are taken in private cars covering different circuits (24 children)	6 communes involved - 20 children taken - in certain communes high costs are borne by the families
School canteen Cost of meal	2 children with the primary classes 1.30 F	9 children with the primary classes 2.50 F	25 meals taken with the teacher and female attendant 2.20 F	26 children with the primary classes 2 F
Behaviour of children	The children's behaviour is natural and their adjustment follows a normal pattern Most of the children knew each other already		The children did not know one another. Some signs of fatigue at the end of the afternoon	Normal adjustment - few of the children knew one another. Workshops common to both classes organised in the afternoons
Attitude of parents	Favourable reception - interest shown in the children's work	Doubts and scepticism on the part of some. Little contact for the time being. The "novelty" must prove its worth.	Participation and discussions - visits to the class - frequent contact and questions	Contacts with Ayen parents - little interest - high cost of transport - lack of information - "open day" planned

SECOND "GENERATION" OF INTERMUNICIPAL
PRE-SCHOOL SCHEMES (1974-75)

	L A P L E A U	E Y G U R A N D E	S A L O N - L A - T O U R
Date of start of class	5.10.74	13.9.74	13.9.74
Hours	Up to All Saints: 8.30 am - 11.30 am 1.30 pm - 4.30 pm All Saints' Easter: 9 am - 12 pm 1.30 pm - 4.30 pm	9 am - 12 pm 2 pm - 5 pm	9 am - 12 pm 1.30 pm - 4.30 pm
No. of pupils	18	23	27
Premises	Work room - play and rest ro m	Work room, no playroom	Work room - play and rest room - central heating
Sanitary installations	Inside - baby-size lavatories and suitable washbasins	Well-equipped washroom	Inside - very suitable and in sufficient number
Teaching material	Varied - sufficient quantity	Suitable equipment varied according to age	Supplied and sufficient
Furniture	Very well equipped classroom - sufficient furniture - new - functional - some work done by local craftsman	New furniture - well suited and very satisfactory quantity	Unsuitable and insufficient - retrieved from a primary school
Female attendant	6 1/2 hours a day	7 hours a day, but provisionally in charge of the canteen	8 hours a day
Transport Insurance and supervision are the responsibility of the carrier	Pre-school class to be extended to several communes - project under study	8 children transported from 3 communes communes by taxi - possibility of extension	12 children transported with those from the primary school
School canteen Cost of meal	2 children with the primary classes 2.40 F	2.20 F	21 children - meals with the primary classes 2 F
Behaviour of children	The children knew one another - newcomers fit in more easily because the others are already adjusted	No particular problem - regular attendance	Most of the children knew one another
Attitude of parents	Experiment well received - "families participate with eagerness and pleasure" - frequent meetings and real interest.	Experiment well received	Experiment well received - the parents take an interest in the class

C A N T A L

PRE-SCHOOLING EXPERIMENT IN RURAL AREAS 1974-75 SCHEME

	PAULHAC 1,150 m - 751 inhabitants	HUYNES 1,000 m - 692 inhabitants	ST-BONNET-DE-CONDAT 406 inhabitants
Date of start of class	14 January 1974	2 October 1973	1 October 1974
Hours	No interruption for lunch	8.30 am - 11.30 am 1.30 pm - 4.30 pm	8.30 am - 11.30 am 1.30 pm - 4.30 pm
No. of pupils	16	11	11
Premises	Existing premises converted - work finished at Easter 1974 - no separate rest room - playroom to be converted and equipped	Existing premises converted - division into two rooms with sliding partition - no play area	Existing premises converted - heating installation completed - foam rubber matting and mats put down for rest corner - door opened up communicating with the yard
Sanitary installations	Outside	Standard	Baby-size lavatory outside
Furniture	Delivered at the beginning of April - inadequate	Supplied in February 1974 - inadequate	Supplied
Teaching material	Inadequate	Room and play area still to be equipped	On order
Female attendant	During school hours	During school hours	4 hours a day
Transport	Paulhac - Cézens scheme - doubts in two hamlets in the commune which fear their primary classes will be closed	No group transport (still to be arranged) - 5 children transported by their parents	Doubts in neighbouring communes which fear primary classes will be closed down
School canteen	On the school premises with the teacher in attendance	Meals are taken in a public restaurant in a room reserved for the children	None
Behaviour of children	The children knew one another little or not at all. The unbroken day system is conducive to rapid development. Some signs of fatigue at the end of the afternoon due to the lack of a rest room	The children's behaviour is natural and their adjustment follows a normal pattern	
Attendance	Regular (2nd winters)	Regular (2nd winters)	
Attitude of parents	Favourable - visits to the class	Favourable - visits to the class	